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Mesolithic Evidence from Troublehouse, Cherington, Gloucestershire

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THIS report is based on a collection of flints picked up in the four fields adjoining Troublehouse Covert, the wood behind the Troublehouse Inn on the Tetbury to Cirencester Road, ST 916961 is the general National Grid reference. The intention is merely to provide evidence. Nearly all the flints come from two fields only, those to the east and the south, but others were searched as controls. The soil is a light Cotswold brash, but there is some deeper, relatively stone-free soil, particularly in the slight depression, a few acres in extent, around the pond situated in the south-east boundary of the east field. This pond seems to be fed by a spring, and the fresh water evidently attracted mesolithic hunting parties, as the flints are concentrated towards the ends of the south and east fields nearest the pond. The east field, known as Ox Down, yielded the great majority of the flints. Cotswold flints are usually patinated to a creamy-white, but because many of those from Troublehouse came from deeper, slightly sandier soil, there is an unusually large amount of unpatinated flint in the collection. This fact accounts for the discovery of the site in 1969. It lies along the 450 foot contour, in country that would have been well-wooded in mesolithic times.

The pioneer of the mesolithic period in mid-Gloucestershire is Captain H. S. Gracie, without whose help and encouragement over many years this report could never have been written. His main contributions, all in the *Transactions*, are reports on surface flints from Leonard Stanley (vol. 60) and from Long Newnton (vol. 63), and his Presidential Address to the Society for 1970 on "Mesolithic Gloucestershire". His experience as a field-worker in the Tetbury-Stroud area is shared with the present writer, namely, that microliths can be found in most fields that have been searched. However, they are in no way localized, and other mesolithic material does not, as yet, seem to be abundant, making it impossible to pin-point occupation sites. But future field-work on a more systematic basis may yield better results, and these will be the subject-matter of subsequent reports, in which it is hoped in the light of greater

experience, to discuss the wider implications of our Cotswold industries. Troublehouse is an exception, in that mesolithic artifacts and flint-working debris are found over a restricted area, albeit of four or five acres.

Neolithic and Bronze Age flints also occur at Troublehouse:

e.g. 4 barbed and tanged arrowheads,
38 neolithic arrowheads,
45 fragments of polished flint axe,
2 fragments of the same polished chert axe.

But Troublehouse lacks the abundance of neolithic cores, waste flakes and tool types, indicative of a domestic presence, as occurs at Long Newnton (general Nat. Grid ref. ST 923937). The interpretation of the Troublehouse collection has been facilitated by comparisons with the large Long Newnton collection in which later material abounds. All the limitations as to chronology of a surface site exist, but the absence of an excavated mesolithic site in Gloucestershire precludes us from ignoring surface finds. These limitations are accentuated by a factor common to all prehistoric inhabitants of the Cotswolds, the lack of raw material. Artifacts and by-products of all periods are small, because the shortage of flint necessitated maximum utilization of every nodule, and dating on the grounds of typology alone becomes an even more hazardous business. For these reasons, no complete statistical analysis of the collection can be made, as it might mislead and would certainly overvalue the significance of surface material. However, some figures will be given, in an attempt to provide a rough idea of the size and type of the industry.

The raw material is flint, probably brought in small nodules from the surface of the chalk downs, the nearest of which are about fifteen miles distant. Cortex is in various thicknesses, but some flints have a very thin cortex that does not occur at Long Newnton. In addition, there is one blunted fragment of a flake in honey-coloured flint, four flakes of Upper Greensand chert, of which one is large and undiagnostic, one is a fragment, one is a pointed microblade and one is a core-trimming flake, two fragmentary water-worn flint pebbles, one rough core from river gravel, and one undiagnostic piece of Portland chert. Such a miscellany of materials, although small, does not occur at Long Newnton, and although some of the pieces could be of any age, the variety accords well with the nomadic nature of mesolithic man, as exemplified, for example, by Mrs Susanne Palmer's study in *PPS* vol. XXXVI on the distribution of Portland chert. Portland chert is unlikely to have been accessible outside the Isle of Portland, which was intensively settled in the mesolithic period.

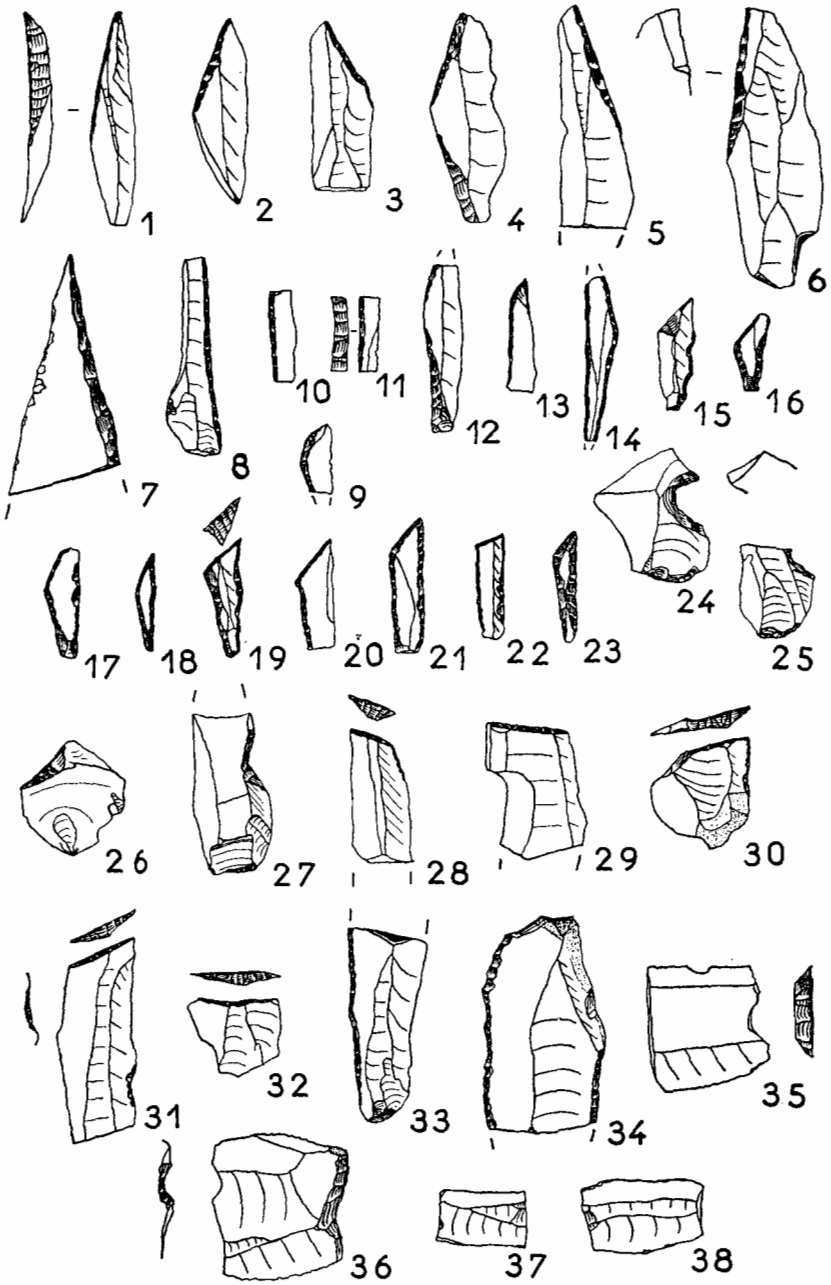

Fig. 1. Troublehouse microliths. Scale 1/1.

The writer has found one flake of Portland chert at Nailsworth, and Mrs Palmer's study records one core-trimming flake from Tog Hill,[1] an industry "in the Maglemosian tradition", and two microliths, scalene triangles, from the, as yet unpublished, site at Cherhill in Wiltshire, which is only eighteen miles from Troublehouse, and would therefore have been a close source of flint. When Dr Isobel Smith's Cherhill site and Mrs Palmer's Culverwell site on Portland are fully published, they may shed some light on our Cotswold industries. Prima facie the Culverwell microliths are not dissimilar to those from Troublehouse.

FIG. 1 *Troublehouse microliths, etc.*

East field: 23,
South field: 12,.
West field: 1,
Field adjoining south and west fields: 1.

The microliths were not so restricted to the four of five acres in the vicinity of the pond as were the mesolithic cores, flakes, blades, etc., which emphasises the transitory nature of the occupation, but microliths are certainly more common at Troublehouse than at Long Newnton, which is as one would expect in the surrounds of a mesolithic hunting camp. The greatest number of microliths occurs in the east field, which also contains most of the other mesolithic material. There are 37 microliths. The lack of basal and inverse retouch, of quadrangles and of rods has allowed a four-fold classification.

Obliquely blunted	: 7 (nos. 1–6) 1 with oblique retouch on base on same side (no. 4). 1 with retouch around a curved base on opposite side.
Blunted down one side:	8 (nos. 7, 8, 10, 11, 13).
Triangular	: 12 (nos. 14–23) 2 with no retouch on longest side (no. 20).
Crescent	: 1 (no. 9).
Others and fragments	: 9 (no. 12).

Nos. 8, 12, 15, 16 and 19 retain the bulb of percussion, a reflection of the necessity to make something of the smallest flake or blade, in order to make each core produce as many microliths as possible. The flake scars on the cores are very small indeed. No. 8 may be an unfinished microlith, as the bulb is rather thick. The effect of the

[1] C. M. Sykes and S. L. Whittle, "A Flint Chipping Site at Tog Hill, Marshfield". *Trans. BGAS*, LXXXIV (1965), 5–14.

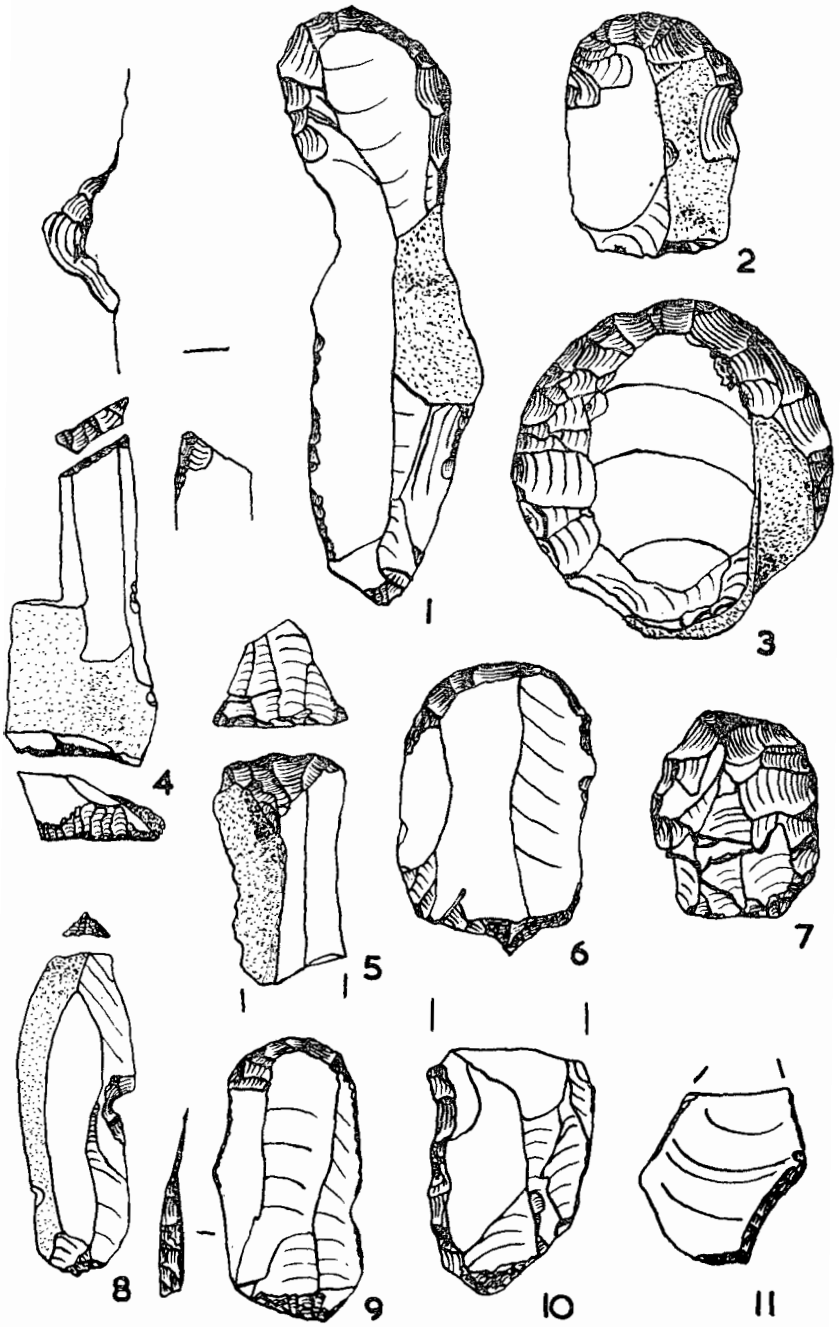

Fig. 2. Troublehouse, Cherington. Scale 1/1.

retained bulb on no. 12 is reduced by a deep bulbar scar; it has retouch rather than blunting. By-products of microlith manufacture are not common (nos. 24–27), no. 24 being the only true microburin. This fact is accounted for by the short supply of flint which necessitated retention, and probably chipping-off, of bulbs, by the general technique of microlith production, and perhaps by the transitory nature of the site. Nos. 28–36 are blades, or parts thereof, with characteristic mesolithic blunting. Nos. 28 and 29 were broken off in modern times. No. 30 is the distal end of a blade, no. 32 the bulbar end, though the bulb itself has been snapped off. About half the blade segments can be divided into two groups on a length basis. There are 17 between 16 and 20 mm (no. 38—18 mm), and 13 between 8 and 13 mm (no. 37—11 mm), of which 7 are 11 mm. This degree of uniformity amongst the segments is clear evidence that they were intentionally made components of some composite tool, the use of which left few signs of wear on the segments.

FIG. 2

About 50 of the scrapers seem certainly to be in mesolithic style. Others are definitely neolithic. Some could belong to either period. The abundance of flake scrapers, and the fact that many of them retain surfaces of cortex, tie in with the scarcity of unworked nodule-trimming flakes and of core-scrapers. Primary flakes were converted into scrapers and other tools on which a cortex surface would make no difference, while the cores were flaked to minimal proportions in the production of microblades. Nos. 1 and 3 are uniquely fine for the local neolithic, though as a convex scraper no. 3 could be of any age. No. 6 is opposed by an awl. No. 7 is representative of some fifteen small scrapers, often made on irregularly-shaped, thick core-trimming flakes. There are three hollow scrapers, one on a large basal core-trimming flake. There is a nosed scraper, found when the illustrations were completed, similar to one from Culverwell on the Isle of Portland.[2] No. 4 is a carefully made pointed tool. No. 8 is a truncated blade with a notch in its side apparently worn by pressure. Nos. 9–11 are retouched and utilized. There are two burins. One is broken, but the other, found after the illustrations were completed, has three overlapping sharpening facets, bruising on the working edge and traces of gloss on the facets. The platform from which it has been sharpened has the negative scar of the transverse flake which removed the bulb of percussion of the flake comprising the burin.

[2] *PPS*, XXXVI (1970), 86, fig. 3, no. 65.

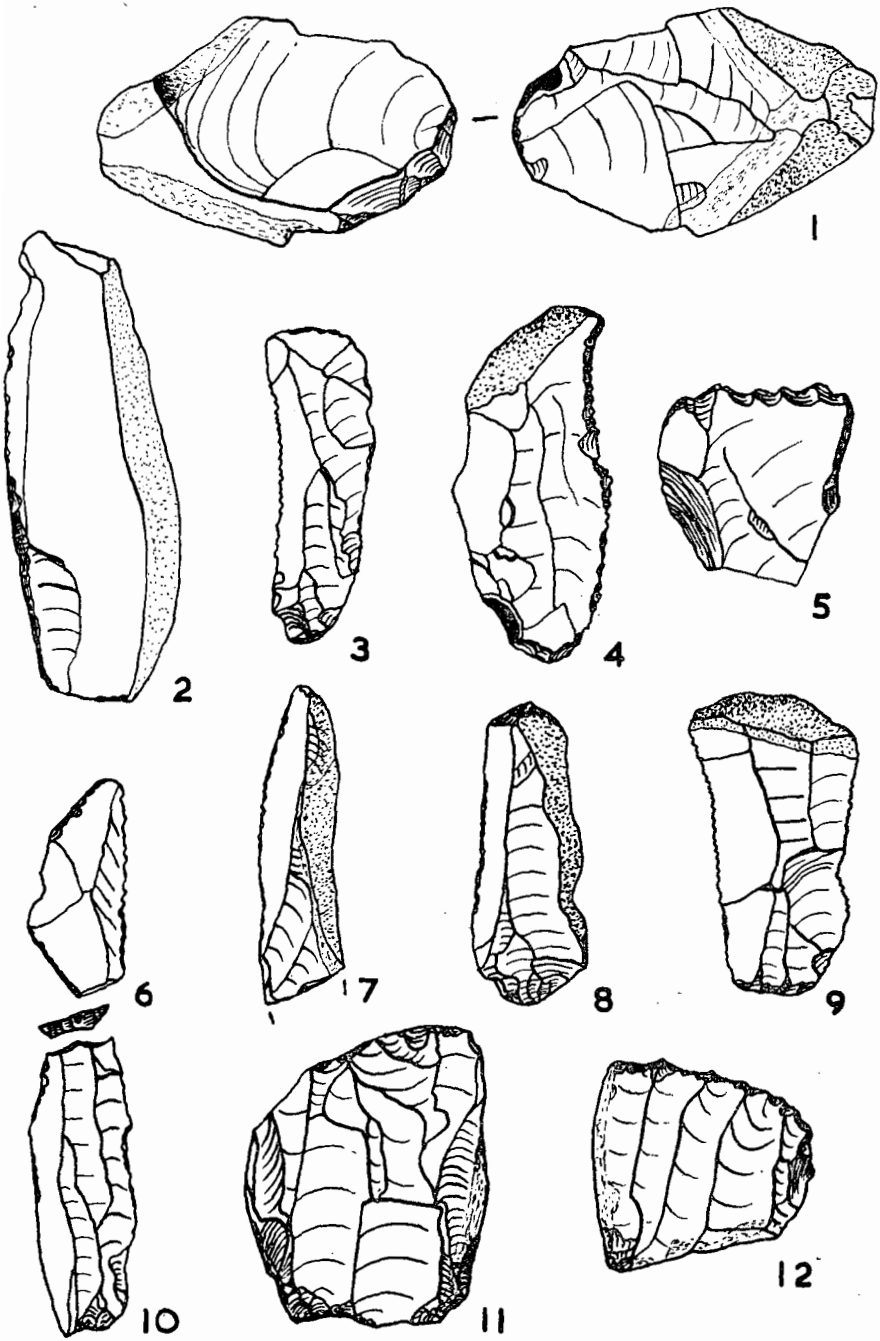

Fig. 3. Troublehouse, Cherington. Scale 1/1.

FIG. 3

No. 1 is an inconclusive axe-sharpening flake. It is certainly not a resharpening flake, because of the amount of cortex on the removed edge. Any axe from which it might have been struck would have been very small. It would not be surprising if axes were used in heavily-wooded country for cutting saplings for the construction of temporary shelters, but no. 1 is, by itself, insufficient evidence. Only one or two mesolithic axes have been found in Gloucestershire. The Council for British Archaeology Mesolithic Survey will reveal the exact number. At Cherhill axes, and at Culverwell axe-sharpening flakes, have been found in association with geometric microliths, as at many other sites, notably of the Horsham culture.

There are some twenty saws or notched flakes (nos. 3, 4, 5, 6 and 9). Saws are not found in the local neolithic. No. 2 is an exceptional blade by Cotswold standards. Truncated blades are not common, but nos. 8 and 10 are good examples. Both have signs of utilization.

Cores

As with scrapers, the assessment of the number of cores is an approximation.

Discoidal: 5.
1 platform: 17 (5 conical) (no. 12).
2 platforms: 10 (no. 11).
3 or more platforms: 5.

Nos. 11 and 12 are both backed by cortex. There is one definite core scraper. The chipped edges of some cores could have resulted from efforts to remove flakes or to remove uneven negative flake scars, and need not be the hallmarks of core scrapers, as could be supposed.

Core-trimming flakes

The small size of the cores has a corollary in the abundance of core-trimming flakes. This abundance points to the mesolithic date of the industry and also to the shortage of raw material for inhabitants of the Cotswolds.

Struck on platform: 14.
Struck at right-angles to platform to renew whole or part of platform: 35.
Struck on platform to remove apex or ridge: 9.

CONCLUSION

The aims of this article are modest for two reasons. Firstly, it is dangerous to make claims about the mesolithic content of a collection of flints of all periods when dating is based on typology alone. And secondly, comparatively little is known about mesolithic Gloucestershire, apart from the fact that Tog Hill is an early industry "in the Maglemosian tradition", and that all the other mesolithic material from the county, with the high proportion of geometric microliths, is later. More evidence is needed, and in the light of this a clearer picture may emerge. At the time of writing (August 1972), an excavatable mesolithic site may be coming to light at Syreford, near Cheltenham, where Mr W. Cox has recovered mesolithic material, including microliths and microburins, from the Romano-British layers of a small excavation. Many such sites could be awaiting discovery. In the meantime, our knowledge is based on surface material, with the uncertainties of chronology based on typology. Troublehouse was a hunting camp, or perhaps a succession of such camps. The fresh water of the spring-fed pond was a focal point for hunting activities. The flint industry reflects the local lack of raw material, as the cores and tools are small. The restricted number of microlith classes may be a reflection of the difficulty of finding the smaller microliths in ploughed fields, or of particular occupational activity, or of cultural affinities, so it is not intended to create a hypothesis on this factor. The perspective in this report is too narrow to tackle the problem of how Cotswold industries fit into the pattern of mesolithic occupation of southern Britain. In some respects, therefore, this is an interim report.